National Council on Family Relations

Building Strong Communities for Military Families

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Our Objective

To recommend strategies for building strong "communities" for military families:

Develop formal relationships among local public, nonprofit and business organizations and the military's community leaders

Build informal relationships both among military families and between military and non-military families, and provide military families with meaningful opportunities for civic engagement.

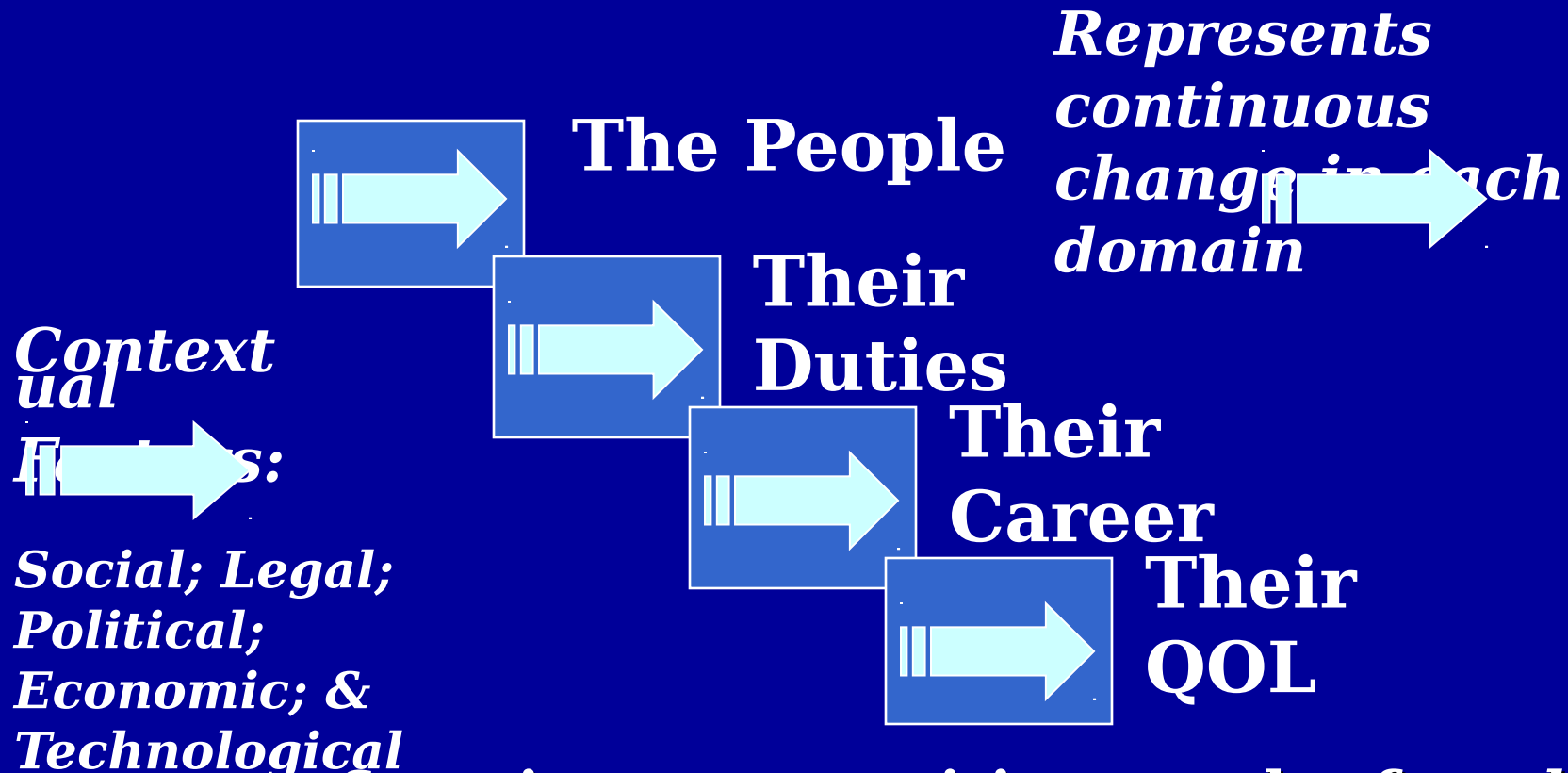*Increase prevention and outreach efforts* to promote and sustain resilient military families, especially families in known high-risk

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Background

The key challenges confronting our 21st Century military are associated with *recruiting, training, deploying, sustaining,* and *retaining* members and their families in the context of the changing nature of the people, their duties, their careers, and their Quality of Life (QOL) expectations.

Our National Guard & Reserves face challenges
that are both similar and unique to those

The Changing Nature of 21ˢᵗ Century Military Service and Community Life

The People

Represents continuous change in each domain

Their Duties

Context ual

Features:

Their Career

Social; Legal; Political; Economic; & Technological

Their QOL

Competent & caring communities are the *foundation* *port* for the well-being of military members & their fa

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Military Family Profile

Active Duty Members* *1.4 million members*

- **47% are 25 or younger**
- **58% are married and/or have children (i.e., families)**
- **86,700 single parents**
- **47,904 dual military couples**
- **1.17 million children (0-18)**
- **41% of children under 5**
- **85% of Active Duty members are assigned in the USA**

Data Source: DMDC 2003

Military Family Profile

NG & Reserve Members   880,000 members*

- 30% are 25 or younger (average is 33.4 years)
- 59% are married and/or have children (i.e., families)
- 69,800 single parents
- 21,303 dual military couples
- 713,800 children (0-18)
- 24% of children under 5

National Guard & Reserves Members (and families) are dispersed in thousands of communities across the USA.

*There are an additional 350,000 individuals in the Individual Ready Reserves – representing a wartime "mobilization pool."

Data Source: DMDC 2003

Nature of Military Service: Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Deployments

- **Since September 11, 2001, 320,000 (36%) Guard & Reserve members mobilized in support of the GWOT.**

- **In March 2004, over 100,000 military members in Iraq.**

- **DoD continues to mobilize the Guard & Reserve for the GWOT - in March 2004 approximately 180,000 Guard & Reserve members on active duty.**

- **Rotations for OIF II underway. Over 100,000 military personnel (including about 40% Guard & Reserve) scheduled to be deployed – most for a year.**

Source: David Chu's March 2, 2004 statement, DoD News Release No. 142-04, and DoD News Transcript November 6, 2003

Key Challenges for ALL Military Families
Related to Deployments

Areas families need to have competence:

- **Plan and prepare for deployment**
- **Handle stress of separation and long deployments**
- **Take care of health and well-being**
- **Know of and access services when needed**
- **Cope with children's reactions to deployment**
- **Manage family finances (in some cases, income change)**
- **Carry out new family roles and responsibilities**

Key Challenges for ALL Military Families
Related to Deployments

Areas families seeking support services:

- **Information on deployment-related topics**
- **Access to services**
- **Communication with military member**
- **Connection/contact with unit and support groups**
- **Military family support network**
- **Employer support in all three phases of deployment**
- **School support in helping children cope**
- **Child care (including respite care)**

Other Challenges for Military Families
Related to Military Lifestyle

- Civilian spouse employment and education

- Military children's educational success

- Financial well-being

- Child care

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Adversities/ Challenges

Family Resiliency

Resilient families may bend but they do not break--they confront challenges, adapt, and maintain positive patterns of family functioning and interaction in the context of development transitions, positive challenges, and life adversities.
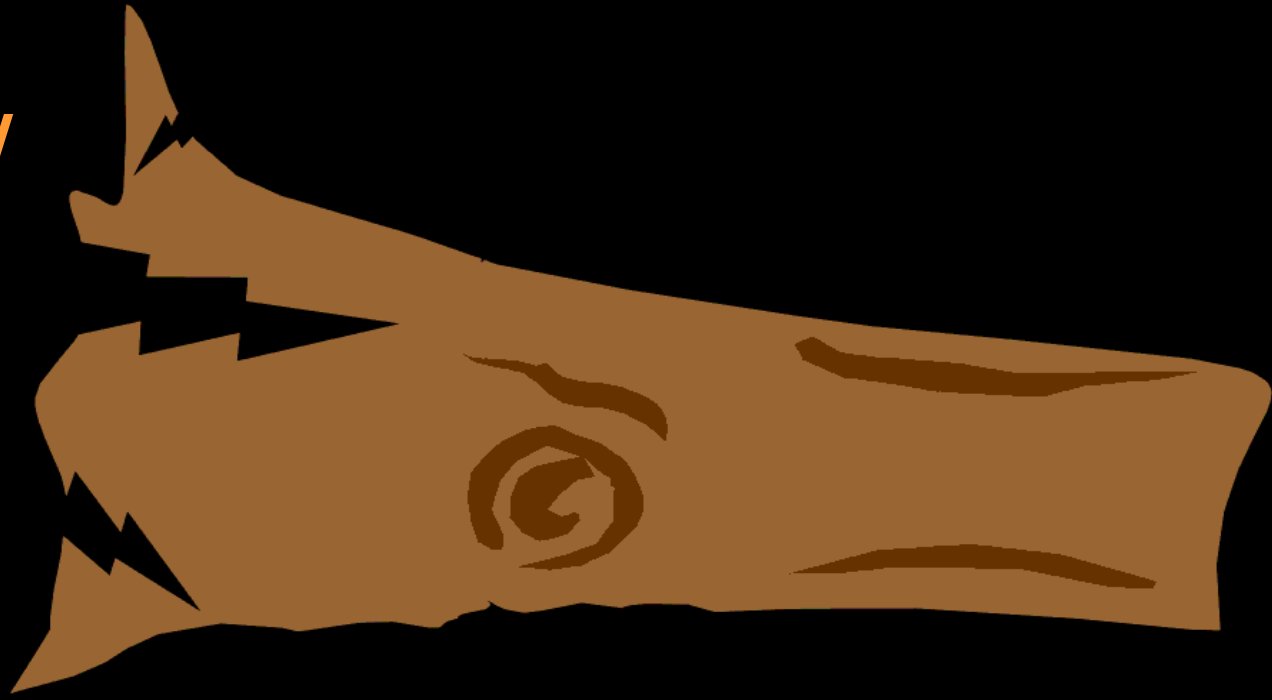
Adversities/ Challenges

Family Resiliency

Community Agencies

Community Connections

Unit Leadership

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Adversities/ Challenges

Family Resiliency

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Building & Sustaining a Network of Connections

Extended Family, Friends & Neighbors (*Informal Networks*)

Military Sector:

Volunteer & Nonprofit Organizations

Support Groups

Faith Communities

Military Unit Leaders

Military Community Agencies

Installation Leaders

Civilian Sector:

Civic & Nonprofit Organizations

Support Groups

Faith Communities

Public and Private Community Agencies

Employers

Local, State, Government

Family Resilience

A QOL foundation must be provided by the Department of Defense, & Congressional, State, and Local Leaders

Why Informal Community Connections are Important

▪ **Connections are significant for health and well-being**

▪ **The informal support network is preferred**

▪ **Informal networks provide these kinds of support:**

- *Emotional*-to deal with despair and worry
- *Instrumental*-to accomplish practical tasks
- *Informational*-to achieve better decisions
- *Companionate*-to spend time in a context for support
- *Validation*-to support feeling worthwhile, competent, hopeful

▪ **Policies, programs, and practices need to be oriented toward encouraging interaction and**

Why Formal Community Connections are Important

- **Formal systems intentional about informal networks:**
  - *Development of ongoing networks established as a goal, in addition to providing services*
  - *Organizational success gauged by supporting informal networks that   are self-sufficient*

- **Nexus of formal & informal support is the linchpin:**
  - *Power of interpersonal relationships*
  - *Expertise of formal organizations*

- **Outreach becomes a primary activity, targeting vulnerable   groups in particular**

- **Strength of this network is found in its**

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A Research Example:
How does social support help spouses adjust to separations?

- **Examine use of Army separation support services among spouses who have experienced a separation**

- **Determine relative contribution of formal and informal support systems to spouse adjustment**

- **Provide recommendations for strengthening systems of support for military personnel and families**

Study Methodology

- **2001 Army-wide survey of spouses of active duty personnel**

- **Spouse adjustment was measured by :**
  - **(1) personal satisfaction**
  - **(2) little/no problem coping with daily stresses and problems**
  - **(3) adjustment to the demands of being an "Army family,"**
  - **(4) satisfaction with Army as a way of life**

- **Predictors: separation risks (experience), program participation and social support assets from Army, leaders and family**

Key Findings

- **73% of spouses experienced separation of 5 weeks or more in past year (33% for 17 or more weeks)**
- **Risk of poor adjustment rises with length of separation**
- **Only 1 in 10 spouses use military separation programs**
- **There are small but positive effects on adjustment from separation   program participation (4% improvement)**
- **There are significant effects on adjustment from:**
  - **Strong marriage (189% improvement)**
  - **Connection to Army systems of support (36% improvement)**
  - **Perceived leadership support (24% improvement)**
  - **Work unit support (15% improvement)**
  - **Friendship support (11% improvement)**

Study Conclusions

- **Military family separations have significant negative effects on spouse personal adjustments**

- **Strengthening the on-going relational support assets of family members has stronger positive effects than providing specific services to separated families**

- **Strengthening the quality of marriages has the greatest potential for promoting positive adjustments**

- **Strengthening unit and overall support for families has substantial positive effects as well**

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Study Recommendation

Family support services should give greater attention to preventative services.

The goal is to strengthen families in general and help connect families to *informal support systems* in the member's unit, at the spouses' work place, and in the local base and civilian community.

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Needed Research

While surveys of families of deployed members shed light on the challenges these personnel and families face, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of how families (especially widely dispersed National Guard/Reserve families) balance their lives and sustain personal and relational support during periods of mobilization and deployment.

Needed Research continued

Civilian research demonstrates that when emergencies arise, the first people to be called upon are family members, friends, neighbors, clergy, employers - the informal support system. Military family research has confirmed these same findings.

We know that formal systems of support are most likely to be engaged when informal systems do not have the ability to effectively respond.

How people balance these formal and informal systems of support is still not well understood.

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Example Policy Actions

✓ **Promote DOD-wide policies and local programs that enhance informal relationships between military and non-military families, and support for related knowledge building.**

✓ **Establish local collaboratives through which public officials, leaders in the nonprofit and business sectors, and military community leaders develop "partnerships" to support military family issues.**

Example Public Policy Actions
Continued

✓ **Shift family support resources to prevention and outreach efforts, especially for families in known high-risk categories or situations.**

✓   **Develop and support a coherent roadmap and mechanisms for peer-reviewed research and program evaluation that links to related civilian science and practice.**

A Few Final Thoughts

We all look forward to a safe homecoming

Soldier kisses his six-month old son upon his return after a year-long deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

by Spc. Kristopher Joseph
This photo appeared on www.army.mil.

We must remember that homecoming has many faces

Transfer between aircraft SOUTHWEST ASIA -- Medical workers and aircrew members transfer a patient from one C-130 Hercules to another that was waiting to take off.

(U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Bob Oldham)

We must not forget the sacrifices we are asking of our members & families

Marines carefully fold the American flag before presenting it to family. Three spent rounds are tucked into the folded American flag to symbolize *God, Country* and *Corps.*

Photo by: Lance Cpl. Jeremy L. Gadson

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan" - *Abraham Lincoln*

Questions & Answers
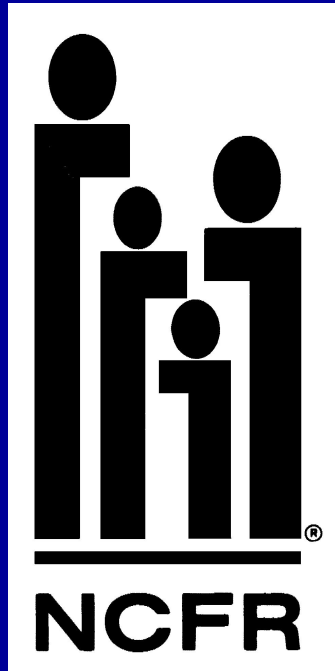
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